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ABSTRACT

Each year, African American high school students in grades 11 and 12 take the College Board/Educational Testing Service Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations. Large numbers of these students are not successful. Nationally, African Americans take a total of 13,844 examinations and 5,447 qualify for advanced placement. This means that 61 percent of all African American students are systematically screened out of the academic process at this level of achievement, while white students have a more than 64 percent success rate. Some states produce greater numbers of African American AP candidates than others, while some have a greater percentage of candidates who qualify and some have students with a higher mean score than others. Gender, subject of test, and type of school attended are also factors in test performance. The data indicate that educators serving African American high school students have a specific responsibility to address student achievement in preparation for these tests. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the test publishers and school districts in which these students are enrolled to begin a serious re-evaluation of curriculum, materials, teaching methodology, and student learning habits in order to alleviate the problem that currently is being inflicted upon African American students. Three tables and two references are included. (JS)

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The Final Blow!

African-American High School Students and Advanced Placement Examinations

Each year, African American high school students in Grades 11 and 12 sit for the Advanced Placement Examinations, a program sponsored jointly by the College Board and the Educational Testing Service. Each year, large numbers of them are not successful. Young people, battered since elementary school by an educational system that often stifles their achievement, once more have their hopes dashed because they are found to be not qualified.

The Advanced Placement Program is designed to encourage young people to begin college-level studies while they are still in high school.

Students may sit for any number of examinations in up to 27 subjects and may receive grades of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Students who receive grades 3, 4 or 5, are considered to have "qualified" (at three levels of excellence), and the College Board will recommended that they be given advanced placement when they enter college.

Nationally, African Americans sit for a total of 13,844 examinations and 5,447 qualify for advanced placement (Table 1). This means that 61 percent of all African-American students are *systematically screened out* of the academic process at this level of achievement, while White students have a more than 64 percent success rate.

It is a tribute to the hope and motivation of African-American students near the end of their high school careers that, in spite of what happened to those who preceded them, many students feel they still should sit for the examinations.

It is an indictment of the way schools prepare African-American students for this challenge, subjecting them to the emotional and intellectual trauma that must be inevitable with what is in effect a 61 percent "failure" rate for the group.

Some States produce greater numbers of African-American AP candidates than others, while some have a greater percentage of candidates who qualify and some have students with a higher mean score than others. However, for the "top 15" States in each category, the three lists are not identical. In fact, only Maryland and Massachusetts appear on all three lists. In other words, States that have the highest *rates* of success in preparing students for Advanced Placement tests generally tend to be States in which African Americans are not concentrated in *large numbers*.

Some might interpret this as a victory for desegregated environments. On the other hand, since most African Americans are taught by White teachers, it may mean instead that when confronted with large numbers of African Americans, White teachers are completely unable to deal with them on an intellectual level. A few may be manageable, but White insecurities across a cultural chasm often are insurmountable.

The overall group performance is substantiated, with slight variations, in the four subjects that are most popular for African Americans, as well as for the national sample: English literature and composition, American history, mathematics/calculus AB and biology (Table 2A).

Except in English literature, African-American males as a group appear to be more likely than females to qualify for advanced placement (Table 2B). Of 1,083 male candidates who entered the fray in American history, 510 or 47 percent survived, compared to 36 percent for females. Although the percentages of

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Table 1

African Americans and A. P. Examinations in the "Top 15" States, 1988

A: STATES - BY NUMBER QUALIFIED

STATE	AFRICAN AMERICANS #Exams	#Qualf	%Qualf	Mean
New York	1,819	879	48	2.6
California	1,476	647	44	2.5
Florida	1,580	446	28	2.0
Illinois	798	326	41	2.3
Maryland	573	298	52	2.7
Virginia	596	292	49	2.5
South Carolina	1,011	277	27	2.0
Georgia	697	229	33	2.2
Ohio	519	213	41	2.3
North Carolina	395	176	45	2.4
New Jersey	355	164	46	2.5
Texas	432	162	38	2.3
Tennessee	561	152	27	2.0
Massachusetts	238	141	59	3.0
Pennsylvania	255	130	51	2.6
"TOP 15" TOTAL	11,305	4,532	40	
US TOT - AfrAmer	13,844	5,447	39	
PERCENT OF TOTAL	82	83		

B: STATES - BY PERCENT QUALIFIED

STATE	AFRICAN AMERICANS #Exams	#Qualf	%Qualf	Mean
North Dakota	1	1	100	3.0
Vermont	1	1	100	5.0
Hawaii	11	9	82	3.4
New Hampshire	15	11	73	3.1
Alaska	15	10	67	3.0
Nebraska	14	9	64	2.9
Oregon	16	10	63	2.8
Kansas	41	25	61	2.8
Washington	52	31	60	2.7
Massachusetts	238	141	59	3.0
Maine	9	5	56	2.8
Minnesota	60	33	55	2.8
Maryland	573	298	52	2.7
Pennsylvania	255	130	51	2.6
Connecticut	140	70	50	2.6
"TOP 15" TOTAL	1,441	784	54	
US TOT - AfrAmer	13,844	5,447	39	
PERCENT OF TOTAL	10	14		

C: STATES - BY MEAN

STATE	AFRICAN AMERICANS #Exams	#Qualf	%Qualf	Mean
Vermont	1	1	100	5.0
Hawaii	11	9	82	3.4
New Hampshire	15	11	73	3.1
North Dakota	1	1	100	3.0
Alaska	15	10	67	3.0
Massachusetts	238	141	59	3.0
Nebraska	14	9	64	2.9
Oregon	16	10	63	2.8
Minnesota	60	33	55	2.8
Maine	9	5	56	2.8
Kansas	41	25	61	2.8
Washington	52	31	60	2.7
Maryland	573	298	52	2.7
New Mexico	25	12	48	2.6
Connecticut	140	70	50	2.6
"TOP 15" TOTAL	1,211	666	55	
US TOT - AfrAmer	13,844	5,447	39	
PERCENT OF TOTAL	9	12		

(Source: Computations made by the Institute for Independent Education from The College Board data for the Advanced Placement Program, 1988.)

all males who qualified tend to be higher than the percentages of all females, there are in fact greater numbers of female candidates (2,620 females taking English literature, compared to 1,149 males).

When various ethnic groups are compared, African-American males and females are among the least successful on all the tests (Table 3A).

It also appears that African American students preparing for Advanced Placement examinations suffer more at the hands of public schools than do other groups (Table 3B). Comparing the percentage who are successful in public schools with the percentage successful in private schools, most ethnic groups have only a 4 to 10 point spread, but African Americans in public schools are 26 points worse off than those in private schools.

Recommendations

The data indicate that educators serving African-American high school students have a very specific responsibility to address student achievement in preparation for these tests.

In light of other findings by the Institute that most African Americans attend schools that are below national norms (Institute Report No. 3), any changes that are instituted also must reverberate down to the elementary school level. Furthermore, successfully addressing issues that affect African Americans will have a beneficial impact on Chicano, Puerto Rican and other Hispanic Americans as well.

There is a need for further research to develop both academic and ethnographic profiles of successful students and their teachers and to compare them to profiles of unsuccessful students and their teachers.

The rate at which African-American students feel driven to take tests for which they are ill prepared also is a matter of great concern. It may be too racially and politically explosive for White teachers to suggest to some of the African-American candidates that they are not yet ready to take these tests, if indeed the teachers themselves have any way of knowing. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the test publishers and school districts in which

Table 2

African-American Performance on A. P. Exams, 1988

A: SUMMARY OF FOUR SUBJECTS

	AfrAmer	US Total
ENG. LIT. & COMP:		
Number of Exams Taken	3,769	91,899
Number Qualified	1,436	63,328
Percent Qualified	38	69
Mean Score	2.27	3.07
AMERICAN HISTORY:		
Number of Exams Taken	2,808	82,283
Number Qualified	1,134	53,990
Percent Qualified	40	66
Mean Score	2.10	3.07
MATH/CALCULUS AB:		
Number of Exams Taken	1,672	53,395
Number Qualified	650	36,358
Percent Qualified	39	68
Mean Score	1.97	3.10
BIOLOGY:		
Number of Exams Taken	1,165	30,612
Number Qualified	392	19,511
Percent Qualified	34	64
Mean Score	1.64	3.05

B: MALES v. FEMALES ON SIX SUBJECTS

	MALES		
Subjects	Number Exams	Number Qualif.	Percent Qualif.
English Literature	1,149	417	36
American History	1,083	510	47
Math/Calculus AB	742	337	45
Biology	395	153	39
English Language	269	99	37
European History	263	115	44

	FEMALES		
Subjects	Number Exams	Number Qualif.	Percent Qualif.
English Literature	2,620	1,019	39
American History	1,725	624	36
Math/Calculus AB	930	313	34
Biology	770	229	30
English Language	522	179	34
European History	307	117	38

(Source: Computations made by the Institute for Independent Education from The College Board data for the Advanced Placement Program, 1988.)

Table 3

Ethnic Group Performance on A. P. Exams, 1988

A: MALES v. FEMALES AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS

Ethnic Groups	MALES # Exams	MALES # Qualif.	MALES % Qualif.	FEMALES # Exams	FEMALES # Qualif.	FEMALES % Qualif.
African American	5,411	2,316	43	8,433	3,131	37
Chicano/Mexican American	3,108	1,845	59	3,893	2,289	59
American Indian	553	331	60	519	270	52
Puerto Rican	1,051	636	61	1,217	786	65
Other Hispanic American	4,192	2,903	69	4,738	3,338	71
Other	2,744	1,890	69	2,189	1,427	65
White	162,233	113,817	70	148,028	96,765	65
Asian	24,934	18,005	72	19,374	13,135	68
No Response	14,128	10,238	72	12,356	8,444	68

B: ETHNIC GROUPS IN PUBLIC v. PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Ethnic Groups	PUBLIC SCHOOLS # Exams	PUBLIC SCHOOLS # Qualif.	PUBLIC SCHOOLS % Qualif.	PRIVATE SCHOOLS # Exams	PRIVATE SCHOOLS # Qualif.	PRIVATE SCHOOLS % Qualif.
American Indian	882	485	55	190	116	61
African American	11,730	4,150	35	2,114	1,297	61
Chicano/Mexican American	5,490	3,120	57	1,511	1,014	67
Asian American	35,908	25,008	70	8,400	6,132	73
Puerto Rican	1,418	833	59	850	589	69
Other Hispanic	6,286	4,291	68	2,644	1,950	74
White	240,439	161,174	67	69,822	49,408	71
Other	3,447	2,256	65	1,486	1,061	71
No Response	19,155	13,155	69	7,329	5,527	75
US TOTAL	324,755	214,472	66	94,346	67,094	71

(Source: Computations made by the Institute for Independent Education from The College Board data for the Advanced Placement Program, 1988.)

these students are enrolled to begin a serious re-evaluation of curriculum, materials, teaching methodology and student learning habits to alleviate this tragedy that currently is being inflicted upon African-American students.

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